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You Don't Mess Around With Jim

OR Ingrid Croce Either!

A personal interview with Ingrid Croce

by **Spencer Betz**

"Ingrid Croce's a single mom! Well, she was the whole time I was growing up," said Star Thompson enthusiastically. I was searching for a cover story. The perfect cover story actually. One that would grace this special debut Internet issue of Just for You. And not just anyone would do. No, I was on a mission to find a role model single parent. Star was ecstatic with the idea of featuring Ingrid Croce. (Not only for the cover story, but as an Award recipient as well.) I cast aside the silent judgment that had popped into my head (What can someone with her money, power and influence possibly have in common with the majority of single parents?) And thought well, it's worth investigating



Single mom Ingrid Croce found her niche in the restaurant and nightclub industry.

It didn't take long for me to realize that I had to "eat crow" (recipe not included in THYME IN A BOTTLE). The story of Ingrid's life humbled me immediately, and I concede as much, here in plain writing for the whole world to see. This woman has been through and survived, more than I. She has overcome obstacles which I have faced only in nightmares (and hers were reoccurring, whereas my nightmares were a one time thing).

She has experienced successes which have gained her the respect of celebrity status, on her own, from people all over the world. And, I'm a far cry from the notoriety thing. So, I stand before all of you, my head hung in disgrace at having passed an unspoken judgment. I was wrong. Ingrid Croce has much in common with single parents. After all, she herself was a single parent for nearly a decade and a half.

I did my research. Or at least I thought I had. Reading THYME IN A BOTTLE and interviewing Ingrid Croce proved to me that my research was lacking, to say the least. This was my first "celebrity" interview and I was a little nervous waiting on Ingrid's incoming call. Less than a minute into our conversation and I was slouched in my chair, comfortable with a cup of coffee and listening to





Many of Songwriter/Singer Jim Croce's lyrics were inspired by his love for his wife Ingrid.

this incredible woman, her voice confident, full of warmth, friendliness, laughter and kindness. I felt as though we were friends who had lost touch for a few years and she was bringing me up to date on the chain of events in her life that had transpired since we had last spoken. In addition to the

generous amount of time Ingrid granted for this interview, she gave me an autographed a copy of her book *THYME IN A BOTTLE*. She had even marked a couple of spots for me to reference. I started to read. I continued to read. And even though I eventually stopped reading long enough to write this Interview article, tomorrow, I will read some more. So here I am, thirteen and a half hours later. Let me share with you what an incredible woman Ingrid Croce really is.

JFY : *You are definitely a single mom who has worn many hats. What are some of the projects that you have been involved in that have been an inspiration in your life?*

INGRID: I have been involved in many projects in my life - art, music, business, international relations, litigation and education. But the most important and the most inspiring opportunity was raising my son A.J.

JFY : *Not too long after your husband's passing, you were faced with more bad news. This time it involved A.J.'s health. At four years old, a brain tumor syndrome caused your son to become completely blind. (A.J. has now gained partial sight.)*

INGRID: That was absolutely, without question, the most devastating experience in my life. Facing the fact that your child could imminently die and not knowing quite how to deal with that. And then when you find out that your child is going to live, but be blind, you have to learn to deal with trying to keep a normal environment for your son so people don't try to make your child an invalid, but treat him in a normal way.



A.J., Ingrid's son, has made his own way in the world.

JFY : *You had been married to Jim Croce for 7 years before his death in 1973. The realization that you were alone and solely responsible for raising your son had to be an emotional experience*

for you.

INGRID: “Because my parents were divorced when I was five, my whole life I had dreamed of being a ‘real’ family, with 2 parents and lots of children. So when Jim died, my world crumbled. I was devastated! To get through the anger, sadness and the feeling of utter abandonment, I had to work hard on spiritually surviving my loss. I was a widow and single parent at age 26 and I had absolutely no idea what I was going to do.

JFY: *I think most of us have this idea that people such as yourself, are unable to relate to the financial difficulties that so many single parents face on a daily basis.*

INGRID: “Jim died penniless. And we had our share of struggles. In Pennsylvania, our financial situation became so difficult that Jim pawned his guitars to pay rent. “You Don’t Mess Around With Jim” reached number one on the charts and still, Jim’s pockets were empty. When we first moved to San Diego from Pennsylvania, we were shopping in a thrift store in Ocean Beach and as we were roaming the aisles of used jeans for Jim, the store clerk got a good look at Jim and said, ‘Hey man, you look just like Jim Croce, man. You could make a lot of money pretending’ to be him, man.’ There was an incredible irony about what fans thought was happening with Jim and what we were actually experiencing.”

JFY: *You had a singing career and actually cut three albums. Did you ever consider staying in the recording business and becoming a famous singer/songwriter yourself?*

INGRID: “Fame was never important to me, but music was the most spiritual thing I knew and I wanted to continue doing it as long as it brought me and others joy. In 1968 Jim and I moved to New York to write and record our first album Jim and Ingrid Croce, on Capitol Records. We worked very hard to make our careers successful by promoting our music on the college campus circuit, playing to audiences of two to two thousand. In 1978 I recorded an album, Reaching Out, with Riva Records and the Rod Stewart Group. And in 1980 recorded a second album with Nik Venet, titled In an Unfamiliar Way. While on tour in 1983 promoting my music, I developed vocal chord problems that resulted in a failed surgery. Unable to sing, I went in search of where my passion led me.”

JFY: *What are your thoughts about fame?*

INGRID: “Fame is a difficult thing, especially in a time when so many people believe that fame is important. In my case, with Jim’s celebrity, there were many obstacles and ‘takers’ that were in our way. But there were also opportunities that we were privileged to. So I don’t think anyone gets through life easily. The trick is to make

it as happy a life for you and your family as you can.”

JFY : *You have remarried and are extremely happy. So, that means that there's light at the end of the tunnel and it's not a train?*

INGRID: “Of course there is. There is always light when there is hope. And I never gave up hope that I would or could find a partner. My husband Jim Rock is a wonderful husband, parent and partner. He has been extremely supportive and encouraging for A.J. and me since we met when my son was just 15.”

JFY : *You've written a book, *THYME IN A BOTTLE*. Is there another book in the works?*

INGRID: “Fifteen years after Jim's death, a fan letter from a student in Louisiana, spurred me on to write the life story of Jim Croce with my husband, Jim Rock. This was a difficult endeavor, writing a biography of my first husband with my second husband. Though the book has not yet been published, the four years we worked together to uncover the past cleared a wonderful path for our future.”

JFY : *Your son has grown up to be famous and successful in his own right. Tell us about the days when it was just the two of you.*

INGRID: “From the time that A.J. was small, we traveled together every opportunity we had. Usually we did it on a shoestring, sometimes spending as little as \$28 a month in Costa Rica. Other times, we were privileged to travel to India and Nepal and trek the Himalayas. We visited many countries, exploring diverse lifestyles, cuisines and cultures. A.J. and I were best friends.”

JFY : *As single parents, we all hope to be successful in raising healthy, community contributing adults. As someone who I see as being an extremely successful role model as a single parent, what piece of advice can you offer to those of us who are still striving to make it to the finish line?*

INGRID: “I think the best thing a parent can do is to mirror their child and help them to recognize their real qualities. Being honest and strong in both your word and your actions is often difficult but very important. Secondly, do things that feel good. And last, but certainly not least, you're never going to do this exactly right. You're going to make lots of mistakes and the sooner you get started, the better you'll get at it.”

JFY : *I think that “we” the everyday people, often think of public figures and celebrities as untouched by the real world. How do you disagree?*

INGRID: “People often put celebrities on a pedestal. But in reality, everybody deals within the same parameters of the world. The problem for a parent who is a celebrity is that their kids tend to be put on that pedestal too, there in that spotlight with you and also in the shadow. Everybody is becoming famous these days. In some ways it kind of neutralizes things. But in some ways, it’s a little scary for kids to grow up thinking that the only value in life is to be famous and that it’s the most important thing, They may not recognize that to live life as a productive, independent, self-aware person is the most important thing.”

A Few More Words From Ingrid

“Sometimes life is an uphill fight every step of the way and sometimes it’s easy. I feel that I am successful because I do my best to live life to its fullest every single day. I have a world of respect for women, and men, who raise children on their own. There is nothing more responsible than good parenting. Children learn by what they see, not so much by what you tell them. There are times when you wonder are you doing the right thing? Are you being a good parent? You have to believe you can do the right thing and that’s not always easy. You won’t see it right away, kids are going to be defiant and try things on their own. But, if you do good things for yourself, your kids will learn from that and when they are thirty or forty, you may see the payback. I think what you’re doing here with this magazine is great. I think people like you who are helping people, are going to be very successful. And I believe that your magazine will be successful because you’re tapping into a large group of individuals who have the same responsibilities for their children and who want to succeed. Giving them this opportunity to learn from others is wonderful!

Ingrid Today

In the interview portion of this feature, Ingrid shared that following Jim Croce’s death she didn’t know what to do. Unable to sing any longer, Ingrid, through the encouragement of friends and family, opened Croce’s Restaurant & Jazz Bar in 1985. Today, Croce’s Restaurants & Bars are the hottest in downtown San Diego. The success of Croce’s fine dining and entertainment she created put her on the map as a San Diego Landmark along with San Diego Zoo and Sea World. Ingrid’s sheer will, stamina and her incredible determination



should be an inspiration to all of us. She has proved that it can be done. And that within each and every one of us lies the ability to not only survive, but to succeed.

THYME IN A BOTTLE

"THYME IN A BOTTLE" is a tell it like it is autobiography, cookbook and memoir. It's 271 pages of stories and recipes filled with love, laughter, struggles and successes. It shares intimate moments with the Croce's. The recipes will impress even the toughest of mother-in-laws. (Note: This is a perfect gift for ex and future mother-in-laws. As well as best friends, mothers, family and co-workers.). If you're looking for the perfect Christmas gift, this book is it! Add a little extra gift of love. Whip up a batch of Ingrid's Blueberry Muffins. Place a half a dozen or so in a decorated basket or tin, with a copy of THYME IN A BOTTLE and a book marker with an inspirational poem on it. My address is listed in Just For You, if you're wondering who would really appreciate a gift like this!



M.O.M.S. has graciously accepted Ingrid's offer to contribute a portion of all books sales generated from our Organization. So, if you want to take advantage of this generosity and order your own personal copy of THYME in a Bottle, go to: www.croces.com (When ordering, please type in "MOMS" on the "Company" line.)

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